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IMPACTS OF THE ELIMINATION OF THE LONG-FORM CENSUS

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated September 2, 2010, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services and the Commissioner of Community and Health Services subject to amending recommendation 1 as follows:

- 1. Regional Council request the Federal Government to reinstate the long-form census.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council request the Federal Government to reconsider the elimination of the long-form census.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate a copy of this report to the Honourable Tony Clement, Minister of Industry.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to local municipalities and key stakeholders in York Region.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to identify the implications of the Federal Government's recent decision to eliminate the mandatory long-form census questionnaire from the upcoming 2011 Census and replace it with a voluntary household survey.

3. BACKGROUND

Census data is a key part of the planning for regional infrastructure and services

Census data provides important demographic and economic information for York Region and other public and private agencies. Census data is used in planning for a range of regional services including transit, roads, water, sewer, health care, housing and others. Census data also provides the base for the Region's long-term population and employment forecasts which are used in planning for future urban land requirements and in the planning for infrastructure projects and a range of health and social services

programs. Growth forecasts are used for determining requirements for regional transit services, the regional road network, new schools, hospital and medical services and for social and community services. Growth projections also form the basis for development charges by-laws.

Long-form census data is crucial in regional service planning

The census has been comprised of two types of forms for Canadian households: a short-form and a long-form. The completion of both forms is mandatory. The short-form questions are sent to 100% of all households and gather information on age, gender, marital status and basic household characteristics as well as mother tongue language.

The long-form census questionnaire is sent to a 20% sample of Canadian households. The results are then extrapolated to the rest of the population. In addition to questions asked in the short-form, the long-form census collects information on the labour force, income, mobility, housing, ethnicity, education, dwelling unit characteristics and a range of other socio-economic characteristics of York Region's residents. The long-form census has provided a consistent and reliable source of data on housing, diversity, employment, income and education.

Data from the long-form is used in the planning, delivery, measurement and evaluation of a wide range of York Region's services, programs and policies including providing input to:

- social, health and other community services such as immigrant settlement supports and child care.
- planning for affordable housing needs.
- population, housing and employment forecasting which is used as input to major infrastructure and municipal service planning, determining development charges, urban expansion analysis and monitoring of Growth Plan conformity.
- economic development programs.
- transportation planning for transit projects (including those requiring Federal and Provincial funding) and others.

Federal Government recently eliminated the long-form census

In late June 2010, the Federal Government, by an Order in Council, eliminated the mandatory long-form census questionnaire that is sent to 20% of Canada's households. A voluntary national household survey to be sent to approximately one third of the country's households is being proposed as a replacement, starting with the upcoming 2011 Census. The household survey is expected to address many of the same topic areas as the long-form census.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Elimination of long-form census will likely have detrimental impacts on York Region

The use of a voluntary household survey instead of the mandatory long-form census questionnaire has the following implications.

Lower response rate

Because the National Household Survey would be voluntary, there would likely be a low response rate and therefore, a smaller sample size. Also, the response rate could vary significantly from one jurisdiction to the next, potentially resulting in data gaps for parts of the Region.

Biased data

Bias would likely be introduced into the data collected by the voluntary household survey as certain groups of Canadians would be less likely to respond to the survey (e.g. recent immigrants, Aboriginal Canadians, and those in the lower and higher socio-economic groups). This would skew the data collected by the survey and result in an unrepresentative sample of the population.

Loss of data at lower levels of geography

Varying response rates from the voluntary household survey could result in data only being published at larger geographies, resulting in a lack of information for smaller geographic levels (e.g. neighbourhood level) and less understanding of the demographic characteristics of the residents within different areas of municipalities.

Inability to compare data over time

The change to a voluntary survey means that it would not be possible to undertake a direct statistical comparison of the survey data with the data gathered from previous censuses. While there could be some limited comparative analysis between past census data and the results of the voluntary survey, statistical trend analysis could not be conducted.

Therefore, because of the above issues, the data from the national household survey will likely not be useable in the same way as the data from the long-form census, resulting in the loss of important demographic information on the Region's population.

Numerous regional studies would be affected

A number of key regional projects and studies would be negatively affected by the potential loss of data from the long-form census including:

- York Region Population, Housing and Employment Forecast
- York Region Housing Strategy

- Update of the York Region Low Income Profile
- Development Charges Background Study
- York Region Diversity Forecast
- Update of Community Snapshot Report Related to Recent Immigrants
- York Region Senior's Strategy
- Transportation demand modelling
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities Quality of Life reporting

Key data will be difficult to obtain from alternative sources and prohibitively costly for the Region to collect

The information collected in the long-form census cannot be easily replaced with data from alternative sources. For example, there is limited data on income available outside of the data collected through the long-form census. In addition, even if it was possible to obtain income data from another source, there would be the loss of valuable cross-tabulations with other census data, such as tabulations showing the income levels of newcomers to York Region. Other long-form data would be prohibitively costly for the Region to collect.

York Region expressions of concern regarding the elimination of the long-form census

Within York Region, there has been concern about the elimination of the long-form census. In addition to others, the York Regional Catholic School Board, Town of Markham and the Regional Chair have formally expressed their concerns. In particular, a letter from the Regional Chair was sent on July 15, 2010 to the Minister of Industry, Tony Clement, expressing the Region's concerns regarding the elimination of the long-form census which is appended to this report (*Council Attachment 1*).

The breadth and diversity of organizations advocating against the elimination of the long-form census demonstrates its importance

The elimination of the long-form census has broad implications which will impact every resident and community in Canada. The data from the long-form census gives every community the ability to understand its current needs and anticipate future needs. It gives businesses information about current and potential consumers and enhances their ability to be more profitable and efficient, particularly in areas with rapidly changing demographics, like York Region. While much has been written about the long-form census issue, *Council Attachment 2* provides a good overview of the broader key issues.

Many organizations and associations have expressed their concerns regarding the elimination of the long-form census including other municipalities, provinces, social agencies, Aboriginal organizations, universities, businesses and others. More specifically,

the following are some of the organizations that have expressed concerns to the Federal Government:

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Canadian Council of Social Development
- Association of Municipalities of Ontario
- Ontario Municipal Social Services Association
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association
- Canadian Institute of Planners
- Canadian Association for Business Economics
- National Statistics Council

The long-form census was the subject of a recent Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology hearing held in late July 2010. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Committee passed a motion stating that the long-form census is a vital tool for good policy-making and that the government should immediately reinstate the mandatory nature of the long-form census.

In response to a court challenge by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada, the Federal Government announced that three questions on language skills that were part of the long-form census will be added to the 2011 short-form. These changes to the short-form census questionnaire are welcome, but they are not sufficient to address the impacts of the elimination of the long-form census. In addition, the Minister of Industry also announced that the Government will introduce legislation in the fall to remove the threat of imprisonment for those who refuse to fill out any type of mandatory federal survey.

Relationship to Vision 2026

Data from the long-form census provides the information necessary for the development and monitoring of services and programs that address the needs of York Region's residents and businesses. In addition, long-form census data is a key input in the development of growth projections for the Region, which forms the foundation for major infrastructure planning in the Region. A consistent and reliable data source to inform the planning and monitoring of the Region's services and infrastructure supports the goals of Vision 2026. The long-form census allows the Region to more effectively respond to the service needs of the Region's residents, helps to address affordable housing needs, facilitates managed and balanced growth and allows for more efficient provision of infrastructure.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The elimination of the long-form census will have financial impacts arising from making less informed infrastructure, policy and service delivery decisions. Growth projections for the Region, the foundation for infrastructure service delivery planning including the calculation of development charges will be negatively affected by the absence of census data from the long-form. In addition, municipal governments and community agencies rely upon the socio-economic data generated through the long-form census to support appropriate funding allocations for a variety of human services and supports. Finally, there may be the need for the Region to purchase alternative data to substitute for the information lost from the elimination of the long-form census. This data, while crucial in order to avoid incorrect, costly decisions would be prohibitively costly for the Region to collect.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Similar to the Region, local municipal service and infrastructure service delivery and planning will be negatively affected by the elimination of the long-form census, resulting in less efficient and effective service provision to communities in the Region. Local municipal staff rely on accurate projections for long-term planning, growth management, local service development and planning. The potential loss of data at lower levels of geography will have significant impacts on the ability to plan for and deliver neighbourhood level municipal services and programs.

7. CONCLUSION

In late June 2010, the Federal Government announced the elimination of the long-form census and its replacement, a voluntary National Household Survey to be used in the upcoming 2011 Census. A voluntary survey will likely result in a low response rate, biased data, loss of data at lower levels of geography and an inability to compare data over time.

Data from the mandatory long-form census questionnaire is crucial in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of a range of regional services and programs including: social, health and other community services; planning for affordable housing; growth forecasting; economic development programs; and transportation planning for transit projects.

The elimination of the long-form census has broad implications that will have impacts on every resident and community in Canada. Specifically for York Region and its local municipalities, the loss of data from the long-form census will have negative impacts on

the ability to effectively and efficiently provide infrastructure and services to its communities.

For more information on this report, please contact Paul Bottomley, Manager, Growth Management at 905-830-4444, Ext. 1530 or John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at 905-830-4444, Ext. 1525 or Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director of Strategic Service Integration & Policy, Community and Health Services at 905-830-4444, Ext. 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)

Bill Fisch, B.Com., LLB
Chairman & C.E.O.



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COPY

July 15, 2010

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
Industry Canada
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

Dear Minister:

Re: Request to Reinstate the Census Long Form Questionnaire

The Regional Municipality of York would like you to reconsider the recent decision to discontinue the mandatory Census long form questionnaire and replace it with a voluntary National Household Survey.

York Region and other municipalities across Ontario and Canada have used the demographic data published from the Census long form on an ongoing basis in the planning, delivery, measurement and evaluation of a wide range of municipal services, programs and policies including community and health services, immigrant settlement support, child care, affordable housing, economic development, growth management and transportation planning. York Region is currently undertaking a number of important projects that rely heavily on the data from the Census long form.

The use of a voluntary survey as a replacement will likely result in a lower sample size, less accurate and biased data, loss of continuity with historical Census data and loss of data at smaller levels of geography. This, in turn, would negatively affect the Region's and other municipalities' ability to effectively plan for and deliver programs and services to our communities in an efficient way.

In addition to municipalities, this decision would also have detrimental impacts on provincial ministries, community agencies and businesses, who rely on Census data for making informed decisions.

There are many compelling reasons to continue with the mandatory Census long form and we ask again that you reconsider the decision. Should you or your staff have any questions, please contact Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner of Planning and Development Services at 905-830-4444, extension 1500.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Fisch". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Bill Fisch,
Chairman & C.E.O.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

David Eaves

Why you should care about the sudden demise of the mandatory long census form

Industry Minister Tony Clement's decision weakens democracy, hobbles the economy and dumbs down government

David Eaves

Special to The Globe and Mail Published on Tuesday, Jul. 06, 2010 2:42PM EDT Last updated on Thursday, Jul. 08, 2010 7:31AM EDT

Last week the Conservative government decided it would kill the mandatory long census form it normally sends out to thousands of Canadians every five years. On surface, such a move may seem unimportant and, to many, uninteresting – but it has significant implications for every citizen and every small community in Canada.

1. The death of smart government

Want to know who the biggest user of census data is? Government. To understand what services are needed, where problems or opportunities arise, or how a region is changing depends on having accurate data. The federal government, but also the provincial and, most importantly, local governments use Statistics Canada's data every day to find ways to save taxpayers money, improve services and make plans. Now, at the very moment that governments are finding new ways to use this information more effectively than ever before, it is being cut off.

This is a direct attack on the ability of government to make smart decisions. It is an attack on evidence-based public policy. Moreover, it was a political decision – it came from the minister's office and does not appear to reflect what Statistics Canada either wants or recommends. Of course, some governments prefer not to have information; all that data and evidence gets in the way of legislation and policies that are ineffective, costly and that reward vested interests (I'm looking at you, tough-on-crime agenda).

2. The economy is less competitive

But it isn't just government that will suffer. In the 21st century, data is at the heart of economic activity; it is what drives innovation, efficiencies and productivity. Starve our governments, NGOs businesses and citizens of data and you limit the wealth a modern economy will generate.

Like roads were in the 20th-century economy, data is the core infrastructure of a 21st-century economy. While just a boring public asset, it can nonetheless foster big companies, jobs and efficiencies. Roads spawned General Motors. Today, people often fail to recognize the largest company already created by the new economy – Google – is a data company. Google is effective and profitable not because it sells ads, but because it generates and leverages petabytes of data every day from

billions of search queries. This allows it to provide all sorts of useful services such as pointing us, with uncanny accuracy, to merchandises and services we want, or better yet, spam we'd like to avoid. It can even predict when communities will experience flu epidemics four months in advance.

So it is astounding the minister in charge of Canada's digital economy, the minister who should understand the role of information in a 21st-century economy, is the minister who authorized killing the creation of this data. In doing so, he will deprive Canadians and their businesses of information that would make them, and thus our economy, more efficient, productive and profitable. Of course, the big international companies will probably be able to find the money to do their own augmented census, so the businesses that will really suffer will be small- and medium- size Canadian firms.

3. Democracy just got weaker

Of course, it's not just government and business that could gain from the data created by the census. Ordinary Canadians use it too. In theory, the census creates a level playing field in public-policy debates. Were the Statistics Canada website user-friendly and its data accessible (data, may I remind you, we've already paid for) then citizens could use it to fight ineffective legislation, unjust policies or wasteful practices. If that data is no longer collected by the state, those who are able to pay for their own surveys – read large companies – will have an advantage not only over citizens but also governments. With the decision to scrap the long census form, the ability of ordinary citizens to defend themselves against government and businesses took a heavy hit.

So who's to blame? Look not further than Tony Clement, who as Industry Minister oversees Statistics Canada. His office authorized this decision. But Statscan also shares the blame. In an era where the Internet has flattened the cost of distributing information, the government agency continues to charge citizens for data their tax dollars already paid for, its clunky website makes it difficult to find anything quickly and it distributes data in formats that are inaccessible to most ordinary Canadians. In short, the department has long made its data inaccessible to regular people so as a result it isn't hard to see why most Canadians don't know about or understand the census issue. Sadly, once they do wake up to the cost of this terrible decision, it will be too late.

David Eaves is a public-policy entrepreneur, open government activist and negotiation expert based in Vancouver